

Yielding the floor

Town Moderator Bornheimer leaving after 28 years

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For 28 years, he has presided over Town Meeting with humor, impartiality, knowledge and his trademark bow-tie. But after the gavel was pounded to close this year's annual Town Meeting, Town Moderator Allen Bornheimer gave up the podium for good.

TOWN MEETING 2010



Allen Bornheimer

"He has led us through passionate exchanges with unfailing humor and has always done

it for the best interests of the town," said Board of Selectmen Chairwoman Betsy Sullivan on Town Meeting floor this Saturday.

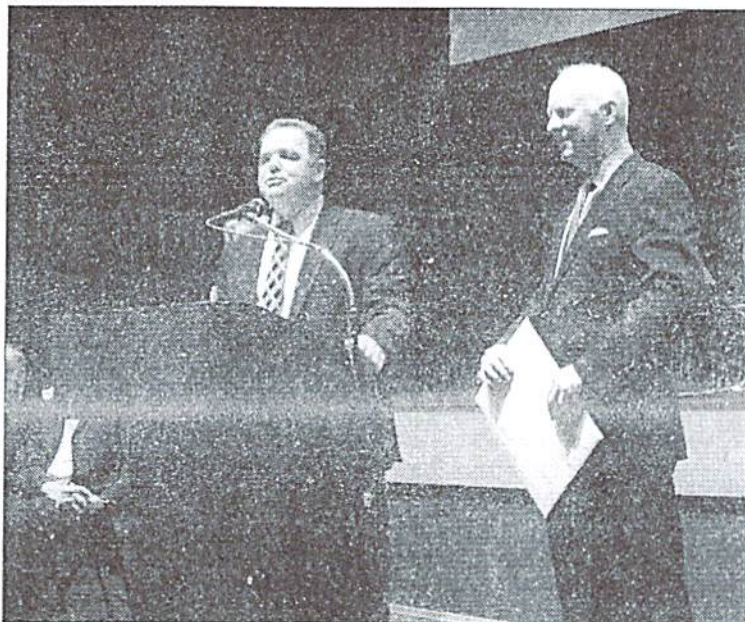
Bornheimer seemed moved by the ovation he received from the crowd, as well as a proclamation from the town and the state, the latter presented by representatives Tom Calter and Daniel Webster.

"I've been to many, many Town Meetings over the years and I can tell you there is no moderator that conducts the heart of Town Meeting with more dignity and more congeniality than Allen Bornheimer," said Webster.

When Calter asked if he should read the entirety of the House of Representative's proclamation into the record, Bornheimer — ever the moderator — joked that he "had five minutes."

"I loved the job," Bornheimer said later. "It was a lot of fun and I will miss it."

He said that the quality of Duxbury's decision making was always what made Town Meetings a pleasure to preside over.



BIPARTISAN SUPPORT: State representatives Tom Calter and Dan Webster presented outgoing Town Moderator Allen Bornheimer with a proclamation from the House of Representatives honoring his 29 years of service to Duxbury.

"The thing that has always made me feel good was when there were difficult issues, we had first rate presentations and debate," he said.

A particular memory that stands out is during the 1980s, when difficult budgets and the restrictions of Proposition 2 1/2 had the schools and other town departments at each other's throats. At one Town Meeting, school proponents had the

numbers to pass amendments easily. One man got up and proposed adding money to the school budget, but his fellow school parents said no.

"That to me was real statesmanship," Bornheimer said. "They said, 'we've all got to live together here.'"

He said that over the years, he has been impressed with the preparation that goes into Town Meeting.

"Everybody puts in a huge amount of work," he said. "I think the quality of decision making at our town meetings is excellent."

He said that the one piece of advice he'd pass on to the next moderator would be to stress preparation.

"Preparation, preparation, preparation. That's what I tell my committees too," he said. "If an issue comes up, I want to know what's going on."

Although Bornheimer said that he has always seen his role as an impartial arbiter of the Town Meeting forum, his contributions have not gone unnoticed.

"They say a moderator is not supposed to impact the outcome of town meeting," said Tom Calter when presenting the commendation from the House. "They say a moderator is supposed to facilitate a fair and open process, but the reality is, in Allen's case, you have impacted the outcome by bringing civility, a high level of preparation, integrity and honor to the process."

As for the future of Town

Meeting, as citizens become less interested in government and attendance dwindles, Bornheimer says he hopes the open town meeting in Duxbury preserves, and that the town doesn't move to a representative town meeting or other form of government. He believes in citizens taking an active role.

"There is no perfect way to make a decision," he said. "I happen to think this [open town meeting] is as good a way as any."

Whatever happens in the future, Bornheimer owns a chunk of Duxbury's Town Meeting history, including nearly 30 years of service. As a final tribute, dozens of town officials and citizens showed up to the Performing Arts Center on Saturday wearing — what else — bow-ties.